

Laying Tracks to Graduation:

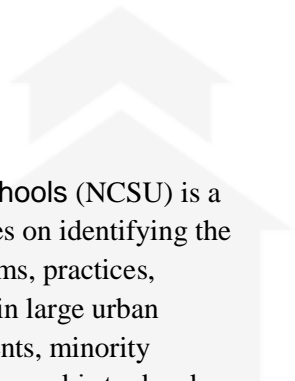
System- and School-level Continuous Improvement of the Diplomas Now Model

Felix Fernandez | Douglas Mac Iver | Susan Sepanik

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The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU) is a national research and development center that focuses on identifying the combination of essential components and the programs, practices, processes and policies that make some high schools in large urban districts particularly effective with low income students, minority students, and English language learners. The Center's goal is to develop, implement, and test new processes that other districts will be able to use to scale up effective practices within the context of their own goals and unique circumstances. Led by Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, our partners include The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Florida State University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Georgia State University, the University of California at Riverside, and the Education Development Center.

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Felix Fernandez
ICF International

Douglas Mac Iver
Johns Hopkins University

Susan Sepanik
MDRC

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Abstract

In an effort to transform urban secondary schools so that fewer students drop out and more graduate ready for postsecondary education, the Diplomas Now model combines a comprehensive reform strategy aimed at enhancing the academic experience of all students with data-driven supports targeting struggling students. Each Diplomas Now school uses attendance, behavior and course performance data to identify students in need of support, plan and conduct interventions, and monitor and adjust those interventions throughout the year. Data on each school's fidelity of implementation to the model as designed along with data comparing Diploma Now schools' programs and services to those of similar schools are collected and analyzed on a yearly basis and used to plan school and system-wide improvements.

Introduction

The Diplomas Now model is a multidimensional approach to whole school reform that includes organizational and structural reforms, instructional and curricular reforms, teacher and administrator coaching and support, and the use of cycles of inquiry to guide data-driven improvements in student supports for urban secondary schools suffering from high levels of student drop out. Diplomas Now provides an influx of additional human resources (i.e., over a dozen staff members) to schools to help coordinate reforms and to help plan and provide tiered student supports. During weekly or semi-weekly facilitated meetings, an interdisciplinary team of teachers and support providers examine and discuss individual and subgroup attendance, behavior, and course performance. Discussed data are drawn from Diplomas Now's Early Warning System to (1) identify individuals or subgroups of students who are struggling, (2) plan interventions for these students, (3) study the results of these interventions, and (4) take additional actions as required to bring them back on track.

As a 2010 Investing in Innovation (i3) validation grant recipient, Diplomas Now expanded to over 30 schools across the country. The grant also supported a rigorous experimental evaluation of the effectiveness of the model and the development of measures to assess model implementation throughout the study period. This paper will focus on the collaborative efforts of the i3 evaluation team and Diplomas Now program partners to develop metrics and measure implementation. The paper will discuss data-driven school-level continuous improvement efforts instituted at schools and supported through the national program. The paper will also discuss the implementation study findings over the first and second years of the study alongside program efforts to apply these findings toward continuous improvement during the study period. That is, how much of the Diplomas Now school improvement model was put into place in these middle and high schools? To what extent did the intervention create differences in school practices and reform efforts? Lastly, what do these findings mean to continued implementation and improvement?

The Diplomas Now Partnership

Three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — have partnered to take on the combined task of school improvement and dropout prevention, and have created Diplomas Now. The Diplomas Now whole-school reform model seeks to transform secondary schools in high-poverty urban communities with large populations of academically low-performing students so that fewer students drop out and more students graduate high school prepared for college and careers. The Diplomas Now model is designed to support secondary education in some of the most underfunded communities in the country where poverty, lack of academic success, and high dropout rates are pervasive problems. The Diplomas Now model is a

comprehensive approach that attempts to alleviate these stresses on schools through structural reform, instructional materials and curricula, teacher and administrator coaching and support, and an early warning system that identifies and targets students falling off the graduation track. The model brings additional people into the school to both support model implementation and directly provide additional assistance for students.

The Diplomas Now partnership works with these schools to ensure that students are getting the support they need to (1) get to school and to class, (2) behave in ways that facilitate learning, and (3) keep up with the lessons being taught. In other words, the pathway to student success in Diplomas Now schools (DN schools) is linked to attendance, behavior, and course performance, the “ABCs” that predict whether students graduate or drop out (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Finn, 1989; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Neild, 2009; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Schargel & Smink, 2001). The Diplomas Now partners collaborate to help schools provide the right services to the right students on time and at the right level of intensity by offering varying levels of support for students with different needs: whole-school support for all students, additional services for students showing early signs of falling off track, and student case management for students in need of deeper interventions. Talent Development Secondary focuses on whole-school organizational, instructional, and structural support and on facilitating the school’s use of an Early Warning Indicator (and intervention tracking) data system in regular interdisciplinary teacher team meetings that also include other school and DN staff. City Year provides near-peer role models to welcome students, call students who don’t show up, provide tutoring and enrichment programs, and reinforce positive behavior and school culture. For the neediest students, Communities In Schools provides case management and connect students with community resources, such as counseling, health care, housing, food, and clothing.

Individual school-based teams consist of a school transformation facilitator, English/language arts and math instructional coaches, AmeriCorps volunteers, and site coordinator. School transformation facilitator and English/language arts and math instructional coaches help school administrators and teachers implement model features related to school organization, classroom instruction, and the responsive use of data. City Year offers targeted student support, with a program manager overseeing a team of City Year AmeriCorps members whose responsibilities include tutoring, mentoring, and classroom aid. Student case management is the responsibility of a Communities In Schools site coordinator, who manages a caseload of higher-risk, off-track students. (See Box 1 for a more detailed description of the Diplomas Now partner organizations and their respective roles.)

A local (city-based) operations team and the Diplomas Now implementation support team also support individual school-based teams. Each city's operations team is composed of a field manager from Talent Development Secondary who supervises that city's school transformation facilitators, instructional facilitators, and school & student support services facilitators; an impact manager from City Year who supervises the City Year program manager at each school; and an executive director from Communities in Schools who supervises the site coordinator at each school. The national implementation support team consist of national representatives from each partner organization and is comprised of the Director and Deputy Director of Diplomas Now from Talent Development Secondary and the national DN operations leaders from City Year and Communities in Schools. Together the school-based teams, the local operations team, and the Diplomas Now implementation team work together to ensure clear lines of communication and support between the school's program staff, the local executive teams, and Diplomas Now national.

The National i3 Evaluation of Diplomas Now

Johns Hopkins University, home to Talent Development Secondary, was awarded a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) validation grant in 2010 to support the expansion and evaluation of Diplomas Now. The five-year i3 validation grant supports the expansion of Diplomas Now from a few schools to more than 30 schools across more than 10 school districts. The grant funds also support a rigorous experimental evaluation of the Diplomas Now model, the results of which, if positive, will "validate" Diplomas Now as an effective secondary school reform model. The evaluation, being conducted by two evaluation research firms, MDRC and ICF International, explores not only the impact of Diplomas Now but also its implementation, providing lessons to the field about what it takes to implement the model and how it rolls out in different school and district contexts.

The evaluation has a school-level random assignment design. Schools were randomly assigned to implement Diplomas Now (DN schools) or to continue with business as usual (non-DN schools), either continuing existing practices and structures within their schools or pursuing other types of school reform. This random assignment design, often referred to as the "gold standard" in evaluation design, creates circumstances under which any differences between the two groups of schools (DN and non-DN) that emerge after random assignment can be attributed to the Diplomas Now program.

As noted earlier, the Diplomas Now model is designed to bring resources and support to urban communities struggling with high levels of poverty, low student academic performance, and a prevalence of high school dropout. Sixty-two schools (33 middle schools and 29 high schools) from 11 large urban school districts across the country were recruited to participate in the study starting in either the 2011–2012 or 2012–2013 school

year. Five of the districts are among the 20 largest school districts in the country and 10 are among the 100 largest, measured by numbers of students served (Plotts & Sable, 2010). The participating schools, all eligible for Title I funds,¹ serve large populations of low-income and minority students (80 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; 83 percent black and Hispanic). Essentially, the schools in the study sample represent some of the most challenged urban secondary schools in the country, all operating in large, underfunded school districts. This is reflected in Table 1, which compares schools participating in the evaluation with other schools in the participating school districts, and with the national average.

In comparison with the national average, the schools participating in the evaluation serve more low-income students and minority students, and are more likely to be located in urban areas. All of the schools participating in the evaluation are eligible for Title I, compared with 54 percent of high schools and 72 percent of middle schools across the country. On average, 73 percent of students in study high schools and 83 percent of students in study middle schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches², compared with national averages of 41 percent and 50 percent, respectively. Ninety-one percent of students in participating high schools and 94 percent of students in participating middle schools are black or Hispanic, while nationally only 33 percent of high school students and 36 percent of middle school students are black or Hispanic. Over three-quarters of study schools are identified as being located in urban areas, while nationally only about a quarter of schools are located in urban areas. The high schools participating in the study also have lower promoting power than the national average, suggesting that they are less likely to move students from ninth through twelfth grade on time. The average promoting power³ for study high schools shows that 56 percent of ninth-grade students reach twelfth grade in three years, while the national average is over 80 percent.

Random assignment resulted in 32 DN schools and 30 non-DN schools.⁴ Many of the measurable characteristics of the two groups of schools were compared: their sizes, staff sizes, and student populations, as well as the types of programs they had available before the start of the evaluation. These comparisons indicated that the two groups of schools were similar to each other, suggesting that the random assignment of schools was

¹ Title I funds from the U.S. Department of Education go to schools with high numbers or high percentages of students from low-income families.

² To be eligible for school-wide Title I, at least 40 percent of a school's students must be from low-income families.

³ Balfanz and Legters (2004) define "Promoting power" as the ratio of twelfth-grade students to ninth-grade students three years earlier (for example, the ratio of twelfth-graders in 2010-2011 to ninth-graders in 2007-2008).

⁴ One school closed after the first year of implementation and all data from that school are missing for the second year of implementation.

successful and the non-DN schools provide a convincing representation of what would have happened in the DN schools had they not implemented the intervention (Corrin, Sepanik, Gray, Fernandez, Briggs, & Wang, 2014).

Continuous Improvement Processes

One focus of the evaluation (and the focus of this paper) is the integration of the implementation research conducted through the i3 (i.e., system-level continuous improvement approach) with Diplomas Now's own school-level continuous improvement process and practices. For example, Diplomas Now school-level continuous improvement approach embodies a "cycle of inquiry" where interdisciplinary teams of teachers within each grade level and each school's collaborative leadership team (comprised of a school-based leader from each Diplomas Now partner and the school's own administrative leadership) **plan** interventions based on individual and group trends in early warning indicators data, **do** the interventions, and then **study** the results, and **act** further based on those results (Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009). The data and organizational supports of the Diploma Now model are designed to facilitate this cycle of inquiry and lead to a robust and a continuously improved tiered intervention model.

System-level implementation research explores what it takes for multiple partners to implement the model, and assesses the fidelity with which the model is implemented (Century, Rudnick, & Freeman, 2010; Dane & Schneider, 1998; Dusenbury, Brannigan, Flaco, & Hansen, 2003; Lynch & O'Donnell, 2005). That is, how close the program elements as adopted by schools came to the designers' intent. This line of research also investigates whether DN schools change in ways that make them different from non-DN schools (Century et al., 2010). Together school- and system-level improvement processes help guide practice and implementation to meet the individual needs and challenges of particular students, particular schools and particular cities, but also inform system-wide strategies and improvements (Lipsey & Cordray, 2000; Penuel & Means, 2004) across the entire Diplomas Now network, one of the largest cross-district continuous improvement networks in the nation. Together, the individual school teams, the Diplomas Now local operations team in each city, the national Diplomas Now implementation support and executive teams, and i3 evaluation team work to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the Diplomas Now model.

School-level Continuous Improvement Process

First and foremost, the continuous improvement approach of Diplomas Now focuses on tracking and responding to short-term data on students' Early Warning Indicators (EWIs), monitoring the interventions and supports provided to these students, and adjusting these supports over time based on the students' subsequent data. Thus, teams of "first

responders”⁵ at each school (1) plan interventions based on individual EWI data and on subgroup trends in EWI data, (2) do the interventions, and then, in a subsequent meeting, (3) study the results so far, and then act further based upon those interim results. Using this cycle during regularly scheduled EWI meetings (involving an interdisciplinary team of teachers and support providers who share the same students), each team seeks to get the right interventions to the right students at the right time. In addition to EWI teams, DN schools bring together the school’s administrative leadership team and the on-site leaders from all Diplomas Now partners to form a collaborative leadership team responsible for identifying and responding to broader school-wide needs. Lastly, Diplomas Now national implementation support team and local operations teams in each city also encouraged school-level improvement processes through data-guided efforts. These efforts include providing guidance, consultation, and resources needed to support strong starts and finishes to each school year, and through the implementation of a national design challenge intended to promote the development and use of new and innovative approaches and resources. The following sections provide detailed examples taken from DN schools to further illustrate these concepts.

Early Warning Indicator Teams and Student Data

One of the first things a school transformation facilitator from Diplomas Now does when he or she begins working with a school is to support the school in establishing a system that provides timely data throughout the year to each interdisciplinary team of teachers in the building on their students’ Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) including attendance, behavior and course performance. Each interdisciplinary EWI team then meets weekly or semi-weekly to examine and act upon these data. By closely monitoring all of their students’ on these indicators and discussing the needs of off-track students, each team of teachers is able to work with other school staff and the Diplomas Now team at the school to support students that show any signs of falling off track to the goal of graduation. Beyond just using the data system to plan supports for individual students and to track these supports, EWI teams constantly use data to reassess and improve the programming provided to students. For example, at the beginning of the 2014–2015 school year, one of the EWI teams at a DN high school in a northeastern state noted that about 20 of their English as secondary language (ESL) students were really struggling with attendance and that they were getting many zeros on assignments and quizzes as a result. Upon closer inspection of the data they noticed that all these worst-attending ESL students were in ESL level 1 classes, the lowest “entry level” for English Language Learners. These students were either not coming to school at all or they would come for a day and then be out for two weeks. Some were even getting officially dropped from the school by the

⁵ Each EWI team consists of teachers and Diplomas Now team members and also often includes the administrator assigned to the team, and a guidance counselor, school psychologist, and/or social worker.

district for “not reporting.” Some of these students went to the district’s welcome center to reengage after they received notice that they had been dropped and others did not.

The first intervention that the EWI team decided to plan and implement was to reach out to the home of each of these students and invite the parents and students to an event designed especially for them. During the event, students and families had a meal together with the students’ teachers and school leaders. Then, the team provided an overview of what the school expected of students and parents and also explained how the school could support students and parents. Shortly after the initial event for parents and students, the team inspected the most recent attendance data for these students and noticed that most of the students had gotten on track and now were attending school every day. However, the tardiness data in the early warning system indicated that a good chunk of these students were coming in tardy each day. The team decided to reach out again to this smaller subset of students and families, this time sending out a very brief survey that explored the reasons why students were tardy. The data showed that a lot of the students had not received their city bus passes and were walking long distances to come to school or waiting for parents or other relatives to drive them. In response to these data, the team decided that the most practical and effective intervention would be for the school to obtain bus passes for these Level 1 ESL students. This intervention solved the attendance and tardiness problems for all but a few students. For these students, the team made referrals for home visits to help identify if there were any specific problems the students were facing at home. Once this team had gotten the Level 1 ESL students’ struggles with attendance and tardiness resolved, they moved on to focus on improving the course performance of these students. They discovered that the ESL1 students’ performance in the daily reading block was much better than in the daily writing block. The EWI team created a new targeted intervention for them: an after-school tutoring program focused on writing.

Subsequently, when the collaborative leadership team at this high school looked at the end-of-quarter EWI results for subgroups in the whole school and contrasted them to the comparable end-of-quarter results from the previous year, they noticed that the ESL1 subgroup results for attendance and course performance were stunningly better this year than in the prior year. The leadership team celebrated this improvement with a bulletin board recognizing this EWI team’s work and promoting the team’s practices to the other EWI teams at the school. This EWI team then presented professional development modules to the other EWI teams on “how to plan interventions” and “how to adapt the interventions provided over time based on subsequent data.”

Collaborative Leadership Teams

The collaborative leadership team in each DN school also supports the data-focused plan-do-study-act cycles aimed at improving the school to better meet the needs of

students, parents, and teachers. Sometimes the need for a broader school-wide intervention — an intervention that may be beyond the scope and resources of any one grade-level’s EWI team — is referred to the collaborative leadership team for consideration and action by one or more of the building’s EWI teams. (Box 2 describes the development and refinement of one such intervention designed to eliminate the fighting between members of rival gangs in and out of school that was producing suspensions, disruptions, and danger at a DN high school.) At other times, a member of the leadership team, usually the principal, will commission the school transformation facilitator to do special data runs for the collaborative leadership team aimed at assessing and responding to the school’s current needs and problems – such as runs to check which current twelfth graders are at risk of not graduating because they have not yet completed certain graduation requirements so that the collaborative leadership team can craft a plan for helping these students across the last mile to graduation. (See Box 3 for an example of the intervention one leadership team created to help students who had not yet passed the required Algebra Exam after multiple tries.) The collaborative leadership team also reviews monthly and quarterly summaries of EWI prevention and recovery schoolwide and within each subgroup and also reviews their own implementation data to identify problems that need to be addressed systematically across a grade or throughout the building. This team identifies and articulates the lessons learned during the school’s latest plan-do-study-act cycles and then applies these lessons by updating the school’s transformation plan and by improving the school’s tiered intervention system.

Supports for School-Level Improvement Provided by Diplomas Now’s City-Level and National-Level Teams

Each school-based Diplomas Now team receives focused cross-organizational oversight and support from its local Diplomas Now operations team and the national Diplomas Now implementation support team. First, these city-level and national-level teams use internal analyses and study of EWI results and implementation data across each city and across the national network to inform each year’s “Opening Strong” and “Finishing Strong” improvement efforts (see Box 4). A second way that both groups support bottom-up school-level improvements is through facilitating ongoing design work as part of the annual National Design Challenge. To encourage DN schools as they matured to continue to innovate and to begin focusing on improving new aspects of their work, the national Diplomas Now implementation support team issued a design challenge to all DN schools in summer 2014 (followed by a new design challenge in summer 2015).

For example, the 2014 design challenge was geared to encouraging schools to develop innovative approaches and resources focused on assisting middle school students with the transition to high school and on ensuring high school students build upon a successful start in ninth and tenth grade by continuing to succeed in their junior and senior

years. Thus, during the design phase of the challenge, the Diplomas Now implementation support team and the local operations teams assisted school teams as they developed and executed a design focused on eighth to ninth transition work, senior case management, post-secondary milestone planning/support, closing transcript gaps/credit recovery, or peer leadership and mentoring and gave a \$1,000 implementation grant to each participating school. At the end of the school year, each participating school filed a report documenting student results that demonstrated the impact of their design and a “how-to manual” with artifacts, videos, and other support materials for other schools seeking to replicate the design.

A panel of judges from Diplomas Now implementation support team and national executive team, named 3 of the participating schools as grand prize winners of the first design challenge. Each grand prize winning school received a \$5,000 check to support its future design work (the implementation grants and grand prizes were made possible by a grant from the PepsiCo Foundation). An example of one of the grand-prize-winning projects was the Emerging Leaders Project: a mentor/mentee collaboration of eleventh grade students, ninth grade students and City Year Corp members at a southern DN high school. In this project, nineteen eleventh grade mentors were chosen from among the Communities in Schools caseload. These eleventh grade students had overcome off-track early warning indicators and a wide variety of other obstacles in ninth and tenth grades with the assistance of intensive case-managed supports and had shown leadership qualities. Each of these emerging leaders was paired with a ninth grade mentee who had been assigned to the Communities in Schools caseload as freshman due to intense needs as indicated by being simultaneously off-track in attendance, behavior, and course performance in the beginning of ninth grade. AmeriCorps members trained and coached each eleventh grade mentor in building a strong relationships with their ninth grade mentee. Trainings included how to be an effective leader, offering appropriate guidance and support to help mentees succeed in high school, increasing academic and social skills, and help them recover from the problems that had caused them to be flagged for case-managed supports. Mentors encouraged mentees to have positive relationships with peers and school staff and also assisted them in becoming actively involved in school activities that matched the mentee’s interests. Mentors also modeled good citizenship and helped create an environment of respect. The promise of the program was demonstrated by the outstanding attendance, behavior and course performance results achieved by both mentees (and mentors) during the final 3 quarters of their ninth (and eleventh) grade year.

System-level Continuous Improvement Process

There are two main types of system-wide implementation data collection and analysis conducted by the research team in collaboration with the national- and school-level

Diplomas Now teams. First, fidelity of implementation explores how well or how much of the Diplomas Now model was implemented as intended in the 32 schools randomly assigned to implement Diplomas Now. To measure the fidelity of implementation under the nine inputs, Diplomas Now program staff members from each school were surveyed and documents about programming at the school were reviewed. Findings were then used to measure the implementation success of each school and inform the Diplomas Now teams so that problems could be addressed and improvements made. They were also used to create an implementation score across schools to track the change in implementation over the years of the study. Second, service contrast investigates to what extent the model—as implemented at the DN schools—creates differences from the school practices or other reform models in the non-DN schools. Service contrast offers insight into how the DN schools might have looked if they had not implemented the model. To measure service contrast, surveys were administered to teachers in all study schools and responses of DN and non-DN school teachers were compared. Again, the i3 evaluation team worked closely with the Diplomas Now partners to identify the most important components of the Diplomas Now model and develop survey questions that measured similar types of programming that may be occurring at the non-DN schools.

Creation of the Diplomas Now Logic Model

The Diplomas Now model is a multidimensional system of organizational and instructional reforms and targeted student support services. The elements of the model are classified as nine “inputs,” some of which represent substantial interventions on their own, such as implementing a rigorous curriculum or setting up a tiered intervention system to identify at-risk students and tailor interventions to their specific needs. Diplomas Now integrates these component interventions into a cohesive model focused on ensuring that all students have a path to graduation. Eight of these inputs are implemented in collaboration with school staff members and align with the Four Pillars of Diplomas Now, a characterization of the model used by Diplomas Now staff members to help them organize their work. The Four Pillars and their associated inputs are presented in Figure 1. The ninth input consists of professional development for the staff of the Diplomas Now organizations, intended to give these Diplomas Now staff members the knowledge and skills they need to implement the Four Pillars. Together the Four Pillars and the nine model inputs guide both the development and measurement of fidelity and service contrast.

Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities

This pillar is focused on school structure and organization and includes one input: Strong Learning Communities. Diplomas Now collaborates with school leaders to organize schools such that small groups of teachers work with the same population of students. These small learning communities create opportunities for personalization where teams of teachers know the same students and can work together to best teach and support them (Box 5 gives

examples of personalized supports that these teams develop, with the assistance of the school transformation facilitator, to get off-track or disengaged students onto more positive trajectories). Students also share the same classes, and become known to one another. These teacher teams and small learning communities function best when there are opportunities for teachers to collaborate within the daily schedule and when they have classes long enough to cover material in depth and keep up the pace of instruction.

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

This pillar is focused on teaching and learning, and on giving teachers the training and resources they need to deliver strong lessons. Through the input of Professional Development and Peer Coaching, teachers have an opportunity to sharpen their pedagogy. The input of Curriculum for College Readiness includes having curricular materials aligned with college- and career-ready standards so that these teachers have useful content to deliver to students. This pillar also includes curricular materials for accelerated remediation courses for struggling students, and professional development for the teachers who deliver them.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports

This pillar includes the inputs: Tiered Intervention Model, Student Supports, and Student Case Management. Providing more intensive support for students with greater needs is the core idea of this pillar. The tiered intervention model involves implementing an early warning system that draws on data on the ABC indicators for individual students. It relies on staff members who work with a group of students in common having regular times to meet to review those data and to plan interventions for students who are off track or at risk of going off track. In the early years of implementation, the Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitator helps organize the Early Warning Indicator data, introduces the idea of a tiered system of responses to student needs, and facilitates the meetings. Once necessary interventions have been identified for a student, City Year and Communities In Schools staff members at the school help provide and manage that extra support. Diplomas Now staff members and their school staff partners also pay attention to trends in the data that might suggest that a school needs to make classroom, grade-level, or school-wide improvements to address issues related to student attendance, behavior, and course performance.

Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate

School reform is difficult, and school staff members often have too much to do when they are asked to effect change. This pillar is about providing a school's staff with additional resources to make change feel possible. The input of Integrated On-Site Support includes bringing over a dozen staff members to a school to help coordinate school transformation, introduce new practices and structures, provide training and support to school staff members,

and provide additional services to students. All of these staff members are trained by Diplomas Now before and throughout the school year. Providing and organizing resources to assist the school's staff helps foster a culture and climate where it feels possible to improve the school and support students better. These auxiliary staff members provide additional support to promote the input of Family and Community Involvement.

Program Staff Training and Development

One model input, Program Staff Training and Development, involves providing the skills and knowledge to Diplomas Now staff members that they need to implement the other eight model inputs under the Four Pillars. This includes training in the summer and during the school year for school-level Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools staff members. To ensure successful implementation at each school, each of the Diplomas Now partner organizations has a system of support services for school-based staff members that includes locally based and national program experts with strong relationships to school districts.

Implementation Fidelity

In tandem with the Diplomas Now implementation support team, the i3 evaluation team worked to identify, operationally define, measure, and set criterion for success for the nine inputs within the Diplomas Now logic model (see Figure 1). Within each input, the i3 evaluation team and the Diplomas Now implementation support team identified individual components and designed a fidelity scale to determine adequate and high fidelity to the model for each component. These efforts represent a theorized and comprehensive list of what activities Diplomas Now would expect to see in a school effectively implementing the model. To capture yearly fidelity to the model's implementation goals, surveys were administered to Diplomas Now program staff members connected with each school. The four surveys administered in the spring of each implementation year were: (1) the Diplomas Now implementation support team survey, (2) the Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitator survey, (3) the City Year program manager survey, and (4) the Communities In Schools site coordinator survey. Implementation fidelity measures were developed in collaboration with the implementation support team to capture the various components of each input listed above. Across the pillars and inputs, 111 components were identified, and a scale from 0 (no or low implementation) to 1 (high implementation) was established for each component. The scores for each component were averaged within each input, and the average of the nine input scores then gave the overall score for a DN school, a proportion of how much or how "fully" schools implemented the Diplomas Now model. Input-level scores were also averaged across all DN schools to obtain the average fidelity scores for each input.

Service Contrast

As noted earlier, it is not yet known what level of implementation is needed to actually effect change in schools. For this reason, it is also important to understand how what is happening at DN schools differs from what would be happening in the absence of Diplomas Now. To measure the service contrast between DN and non-DN schools, teachers and administrators (principals and assistant principals) at all study schools were also surveyed each spring. Responses of teachers and administrators at DN schools are compared with those of teachers and administrators at non-DN schools. These analyses use data only from middle school teachers who taught sixth or seventh grade and high school teachers who taught ninth or tenth grade, since these grades were the most fully served by Diplomas Now during the second year of implementation. All measures in these analyses were created using one or more items from the surveys. Although the service contrast measures are aligned with the Diplomas Now model, the survey items from which they were calculated were phrased generally enough so that respondents at non-DN schools could still interpret them in reference to their schools.

This analysis of service contrast shows whether Diplomas Now is changing school structures and the services offered to students. It illustrates how schools are different from what they would have looked like without Diplomas Now. If the implementation of Diplomas Now were not to create differences between the practices and structures in the DN schools compared to the non-DN schools, it would be less likely that model implementation would result in impacts on student outcomes (i.e., that students in DN schools would do better than their peers in non-DN schools).

Comparison of Fidelity of Implementation and Service Contrast

It might be expected that fidelity of implementation and service contrast would correlate with one another, since both analyses are measuring aspects of the implementation of the Diplomas Now model, albeit in different ways. Fidelity is a measure of implementation that examines how fully DN schools met a set of goals set by the model developers. Service contrast is a relative measure that evaluates how much DN schools differed from non-DN schools in the implementation of activities aligned with the Diplomas Now model. Thus, when DN schools have high fidelity of implementation, it creates more “room” for a difference in practices or structures to emerge between DN and non-DN schools. Alternatively, when DN schools have low fidelity of implementation, there is less “room” for DN schools to differentiate themselves from non-DN schools.

However, there are also circumstances under which fidelity of implementation and service contrast may not be correlated. The fidelity of implementation analysis does not take into account what types of structures and school practices are being implemented in the non-DN schools. High fidelity scores at DN schools may be the result of practices or reforms that

are easier to implement and so more likely to also be well implemented in non-DN schools, thus leading to less contrast between the two groups of schools. Conversely, low fidelity scores may reflect changes that are more challenging to make. This could be true in both DN and non-DN schools. Therefore, while DN schools may not have been fully successful in implementing components, non-DN schools could have been even less successful or not have been implementing similar practices at all, which would create some service contrast.

It is also worth noting that in this case, the fidelity scores are based on surveys of the Diplomas Now staff members at the schools, while the service contrast measures are based on surveys of teachers and administrators, who have a different perspective. In addition, while fidelity of implementation was scored for all 111 program components of this complex model, the measures of service contrast only include the types of program activities that could be identified by teachers and administrators in both DN and non-DN schools.

Fidelity and Service Contrast Findings from Diplomas Now's Second Year of Implementation

The first column of Table 2 provides the average fidelity score by pillar and the average fidelity score by input across the entire sample of DN schools. On average across all inputs and pillars, the second-year fidelity score (0.62) indicates that the majority of program components were implemented at a high level of fidelity to the model, a moderate level of implementation very similar to what occurred in the first year.

Pillar I: Teaching Teams and Small Learning Environments:

Under the Strong Learning Environments input, each DN school implements a staffing model that facilitates both interdisciplinary teacher teams and subject-area professional learning communities with common planning time set aside during the school day. The fidelity of implementation score for Strong Learning Environments during the second year (0.69) indicates that DN schools implemented a moderate proportion of the components (See Table 2). The average score for the top quartile of schools was 0.85 while the average score for the bottom quartile was 0.47, suggesting that schools that implemented more of the model overall also tended to be more successful with this input. Component-level fidelity data indicates all DN school-based Diplomas Now teams had established norms for collaboration, communication, and decision making among themselves, an important first step in implementing other model components. Schools were least successful at scheduling interdisciplinary teacher team meetings as frequently as desired by the model's developers.

Service contrast data shows that during the second year of implementation, core teachers at DN schools were somewhat more likely to report that they taught in classes that lasted 70 to 90 minutes than their counterparts in non-DN schools (See Table 3). DN teachers also reported that they spent more time collaborating with an interdisciplinary

team of teachers that shared the same students than teachers at non-DN schools. However, on average, the amount of time that DN teachers reported working in interdisciplinary teams was less than one hour per week, which is below the DN model goal of multiple times per week. The fidelity of implementation and service contrast findings for the Strong Learning Environments input generally appear to align with each other, and these results suggest that DN schools were not only moderately successful in implementing the components of this input, but that this level of implementation led to differences between DN and non-DN schools.

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development:

To support Professional Development and Peer Coaching, at every DN school, school-based instructional coaches and regional instructional facilitators work with English/language arts and math teachers. The fidelity score for Professional Development and Peer Coaching during Year 2 was 0.42 (See Table 2), meaning that DN schools were generally unable to meet the goals for high fidelity of implementation of this input. Over 50 percent of schools had both math and English/language arts instructional coaches providing some coaching at least once a week, but most schools found it difficult to establish a consistent instructional coaching cycle for all mathematics and English/language arts teachers that consisted of a coach working with each teacher to plan, co-teach, and debrief on at least one class every two weeks. Even though DN schools struggled to implement this input, service contrast data findings show that English/language arts and math instructors at DN schools still reported receiving instructional coaching four times per month more than their counterparts at non-DN schools (See Table 4).

To prepare students for high school graduation and college, Diplomas Now offers schools research-based curricula for all core subjects along with accelerated remediation courses to help students catch up. The input-level fidelity score for Curriculum for College Readiness during the second year of implementation was 0.31, the lowest of all inputs. Many schools reported having district-wide curricular standards already in place. They were hesitant to change to the curricula Diplomas Now specified. Schools could meet the requirements of some of these components by using alternative curricula deemed adequate by Diplomas Now, but the low implementation scores across schools suggest that most schools were unsuccessful in meeting these goals as set by the model developers. Service contrast findings show that teachers at DN and non-DN schools reported similarly high levels of implementation on measures related to Curriculum for College Readiness, leaving little difference between DN and non-DN schools in this area. About the same percentage of English/language arts and math teachers in both DN and non-DN schools — a majority in both cases — reported that the same college preparatory curriculum was offered to all students in their classes and that struggling students were offered additional courses to

catch up to their peers. This suggests that in teachers' eyes, many schools were already implementing these types of practices encouraged by the Diplomas Now model.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports:

Each DN school establishes a Tiered Intervention Model guided by an EWI system that uses data to trigger interventions targeted to student needs. The Tiered Intervention Model input was the second most fully implemented input, with a fidelity score of 0.75 (See Table 2). Many schools were quite successful with implementation of this input and the average score for the top-quartile schools was 0.96, but a few schools were not at all successful, bringing down the average score for the bottom quartile to 0.45. Over 80 percent of schools were able to successfully integrate a tiered intervention model into the school day, having an EWI system in place, and holding EWI meetings at least every two weeks. Additionally, teachers at DN schools also reported doing these types of activities slightly more often than non-DN teachers (See Table 5). Overall, the Tiered Intervention Model input was among the inputs that showed the most measures with statistically significant service contrast between DN and non-DN schools.

Students identified as falling off-track on at least one Early Warning Indicator are offered Tier II support. These students receive additional services which can include behavior and attendance coaching, after-school programming, academic tutoring (both individual and group), one-on-one mentoring, and near-peer role modeling. The Student Supports input was among the most fully implemented inputs, with a fidelity score of 0.73 (See Table 2). Moreover, top-quartile schools had an average score of 0.78 and bottom-quartile schools had an average score of 0.67, suggesting successful implementation of this input across schools regardless of their overall implementation level. In most schools, City Year AmeriCorps members provided in-class support for math and English/language arts classrooms at least three times per week, attendance and behavior coaching for students, at least four whole-school activities to encourage and promote positive school climate and culture, and after-school programs or extended learning time opportunities for students. However, DN schools did have difficulty ensuring City Year AmeriCorps members were embedded in 75 percent of English/language arts classrooms and maintaining a student-to-tutor ratio of 7:1 or less.

Math and English/language arts teachers at DN schools reported that volunteers provided support in their classes approximately twice as often as teachers at non-DN schools (See Table 5). Although as a whole teachers reported that students received behavior and attendance coaching and individual and small group tutoring at about the same rates at DN and non-DN schools, sixth- and ninth-grade teachers at DN schools did report higher frequencies of these activities than sixth- and ninth-grade teachers at non-DN schools. In general, the fidelity and service contrast findings for the Student Supports input

seem to correspond with each other. Although the model led schools to offer considerably more student support services than would have otherwise been possible, limited resources may have curtailed the services available to students not in transition years (sixth and ninth grades), where City Year AmeriCorps members were concentrated.

Students in need of intensive interventions receive individual Student Case Management from the Communities In Schools site coordinator. The site coordinator conducts a needs assessment to determine the range, scale, and scope of the specialized support these students need. The fidelity score for the Student Case Management input averaged 0.59 (See Table 2). Scores for the top and bottom quartile of schools were quite similar (0.56 and 0.55 respectively) suggesting that success in student case management was not much affected by success in the other inputs. The majority of DN schools provided case-managed students with individual plans, enrichment activities, and motivational services. DN schools struggled most with providing professional physical health services, community-oriented services, and professional mental health services during Year 2. DN schools were slightly more likely than non-DN schools to offer the following services related to the case management of at-risk students: teachers arranging for intensive support and interventions for students by making appropriate referrals, needs assessments being conducted quickly to identify students' needs and address them effectively, and coordination and monitoring occurring of academic and nonacademic services for students at risk of dropping out of school (See Table 5).

Pillar IV: Can-do Culture and Climate:

To carry out all the programmatic, structural, and curricular components of the Diplomas Now model, numerous staff members are needed, ranging from Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitators, City Year program managers, Communities in Schools site coordinators, instructional coaches and facilitators, and AmeriCorps members. These staff members make it possible for schools to plan and implement the Diplomas Now model. Integrated On-Site Support was the most fully implemented input, with a fidelity score of 0.87 (See Table 2). Additionally, there was no significant difference between the fidelity scores of top- and bottom-quartile schools, suggesting uniform and consistent implementation across schools regardless of their overall implementation level. As for service contrast, DN schools were much more likely to have volunteers in English/language arts and math classes than non-DN schools, likely due to the influx of City Year AmeriCorps members at the DN schools (See Table 6). Additionally, administrators at DN schools also were more likely than administrators at non-DN schools to report that their schools had a designated adult — other than the principal or assistant principal — coordinating interventions and resources and overseeing math and English/language arts coaches, likely due to the presence of the school transformation facilitator in DN schools.

The Diplomas Now model encourages schools to make a concerted effort to engage in Family and Community Involvement that promote student success. The fidelity score for the Family and Community Involvement input averaged 0.50 (See Table 2). The average score for top-quartile schools was 0.70 and average score for bottom-quartile schools was 0.35, suggesting that schools struggling with implementation in general were also less successful with this input. Over 80 percent of schools sponsored at least one workshop for parents and sending home information to parents about how to help their children with schoolwork at least once during the year. Still, most schools were unable to formally recruit and train parents to act as school volunteers. There were only negligible differences between DN and non-DN schools when teachers were asked whether their school had a plan for parent and community engagement, the frequency with which parents were offered opportunities to participate in school initiatives, and the degree to which the school helped parents understand how to support students' academic success (See Table 6). The somewhat low fidelity score and lack of service contrast on this input is not altogether surprising. Increasing the engagement of families is a particularly difficult challenge for middle and high schools, since parents tend to lessen their involvement in their children's schooling as children grow older (Mulhall, Mertens, & Flowers ,2001); Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004).

Program Staff Training and Development:

The ninth input, Program Staff Training and Development, is about providing Diplomas Now staff members with the skills and knowledge they need to implement the other eight inputs, and does not fall within the pillar structure. The fidelity score for this input suggests successful implementation (0.71) on average (See Table 2). It is worth noting that staff members from each of the partner groups reported high levels of access to and communication with the staff members from the other partner organizations at their schools, which should have helped the three partner organizations become integrated.

Consistency and Change in Implementation Between Year 1 and Year 2

Year 2 fidelity of implementation data suggest that DN schools implemented the majority of program components, and that doing so led to notable differences from non-DN schools. Still, there was room for improvement: The overall average implementation score was 0.62 for the second year (on a scale of 0 to 1), quite similar to the first-year score (see Table 7). However, it is also worth noting that many of the Diplomas Now model inputs expand into schools a grade level at a time. During the first year of implementation, Diplomas Now emphasized services to the sixth grade in middle schools and ninth grade in high schools. In Year 2, Diplomas Now continued to offer support to this group of students as they transitioned into the seventh and tenth grades, but also made it available to the incoming cohort of sixth- and ninth- grade students. In other words, even though little change is seen

in the implementation score from Year 1 to Year 2, the Year 2 score represents services provided to many more students.

While overall average implementation scores remained consistent across years, Integrated On-Site Support and Program Staff Training and Development demonstrated statistically significant increases in fidelity to the model from the first to the second year. Further analysis of fidelity scores revealed that DN schools demonstrated several statistically significant improvements at the level of the components in these inputs: (1) Both the Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitator and Communities In Schools site coordinator were hired and on site before the school year began, (2) the school-based team attended the three-day Diplomas Now summer institute, (3) the school transformation facilitator completed the five-day summer training session, and (4) a joint planning meeting took place prior to the start of the school year. Student Case Management in contrast significantly decreased from the first to second year. The lower score in the second year for the Student Case Management input may be due in part to that same expansion, which caused larger caseloads for Communities In Schools case managers. A deeper look into the component measures within Student Case Management revealed that the percentage of schools meeting the model's goals for case management and academic support went up in Year 2, while other support services seemed to have suffered to ensure those goals were met (for example, life skills/social development services and mental health services at some schools). Moreover, the level of implementation for components in this input identified as critical increased from Year 1 to Year 2, while the level of implementation for components not identified as critical decreased, suggesting that schools focused on those components deemed to be critical. It is also possible the case managers at the schools made decisions about what was most important to implement that were slightly different from the originally specified program goals, adapting to the needs of specific schools and students. For example, the percentage of schools meeting the goals for behavior and attendance support services declined in the second year, but Communities In Schools case managers may have decided to focus on these services less since City Year AmeriCorps members were also supposed to concentrate on them (under the Student Supports input).

Although fidelity of implementation changed little from Year 1 to Year 2, the contrast between DN schools and non-DN schools increased in several areas, including the collaboration of teachers in interdisciplinary teams, the professional development of teachers through peer coaching, and the use of data to identify struggling students. This contrast suggests that Diplomas Now brought more consistency and stability to the DN schools than they would have experienced otherwise. Figure 2 presents a graphical comparison of the contrast between DN and non-DN schools across the first two years of implementation. Each data point in these scatter plots represents teachers' average Year 1

response to a specific survey question under each pillar plotted against the average Year 2 response. The fact that most of the data points are above the line suggests that the contrast in school practices between DN and non-DN schools was consistently greater in Year 2 than Year 1. Twenty-seven of the 29 school practices measured in the teacher surveys had a greater service contrast in Year 2 than in Year 1. The shaded data points represent survey items that did not show a statistically significant difference between DN and non-DN schools in Year 1, but did show a statistically significant difference by Year 2. Although some of the measures only show a minimal increase across implementation years, 9 of the survey items across the first three pillars show statistically significant differences between DN and non-DN schools in Year 2 but not in Year 1.

For example, within Pillar I, there was a statistically significant difference between DN and non-DN schools in the frequency with which teachers collaborated in interdisciplinary teacher teams in Year 2, but not in Year 1. In Pillar II, math and English/language arts teachers at DN schools did not report receiving professional development and peer coaching significantly more often than non-DN teachers during Year 1, but did report receiving it significantly more often during Year 2. While there had been statistically significant contrast between DN and non-DN schools for only 3 of the 12 measures in Pillar III during Year 1, 5 additional practices associated with Tiered Student Supports showed statistically significant differences during Year 2, including teachers' use of data to target struggling students and all 3 of the practices related to the case management of students most at risk of dropping out. In Pillar IV, all of the Integrated On-Site Support measures show contrast in both years while none of the Family and Community Involvement measures show much contrast in either year.

Both fidelity of implementation and service contrast showed gains in measures associated with Integrated On-Site Support between Year 1 and Year 2. But in general, fidelity showed little growth between Year 1 and Year 2 for most pillars, while there was some growth in service contrast across all pillars. There are at least two main factors that could explain these differences between the service contrast and fidelity findings. First, the two analyses use different data sources. Surveys of Diplomas Now staff members supplied most of the data for the fidelity analysis while surveys of teachers and administrators supplied the data for the service contrast analysis. It may have taken teachers at DN schools more time to fully engage with and understand the components of the Diplomas Now model. As a result, from the perspective of teachers Diplomas Now may have intensified between the first and second year of implementation even though Diplomas Now staff members did not see much difference. This theory is supported by the fact that sixth- and ninth-grade teachers — who were more likely to have participated in the program for two years — reported even stronger service contrast during the second year than the full sample of sixth-, seventh-, ninth-, and tenth-grade teachers. Sixth- and ninth-

grade teachers may have had a deeper understanding of the program in Year 2 than seventh- and tenth-grade teachers, who may have been encountering it for the first time.

Second, the service contrast accounts for structures and school practices implemented in both DN and non-DN schools, whereas the fidelity analysis only examines DN schools' programs. Consequently, the decline at non-DN schools from Year 1 to Year 2 in Diplomas Now-like practices contributed significantly to the increase in service contrast, but did not affect the fidelity results.

Conclusion

Diplomas Now is a school reform model combining the efforts of three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — to work with urban schools in low-income communities. It seeks to refine schools' structures to provide more personalized experiences for students, promotes curricula focused on college readiness, sets up an Early Warning Indicator data system to identify struggling students, and brings in additional staff members and resources to ensure those students receive the extra academic or social support they need to be successful. It is a complex, multidimensional program being implemented in urban public schools that are by nature already complex and constantly changing, each with its own systems and needs. The Diplomas Now team at a school works to mold the model's programs to fit those specific needs.

School-level Continuous Improvement

Diplomas Now has been successful in establishing a fairly robust continuous improvement process *within* many DN schools that productively engages EWI teams (of teachers and support providers working together) and collaborative leadership teams (of school leaders and the school-based leaders from each Diplomas Now partner) in planning, implementing, studying, and refining a system of tiered supports for off-track students. Although results comparing students' outcomes in DN schools and non-DN schools are not yet available — outcomes for sixth and ninth graders will be reported by MDRC in early 2016 in its third report as part of the i3 evaluation of Diplomas Now — the implementation and interview data suggest that off-track students in DN schools are receiving data-informed tiered supports aimed at bringing them back on track and the service contrast data suggests that these types of supports and processes are less frequently found in non-DN schools. Furthermore, the Diplomas Now implementation support team and the Diplomas Now operations teams use internal analyses and study of EWI results and implementation data across the network to inform each year's "Opening Strong" and "Finishing Strong" improvement efforts (as shown in Box 4) and have instituted annual design challenges to inspire school staff to make programmatic improvements.

In recent years, Diplomas Now has been responding to network-level data indicating areas of continuing need within the network of schools by providing guidance and tools to help school teams design (and share) new needed interventions and also to begin plan-do-study-act cycles of improvement on additional topics that “mature” DN schools are now ready to tackle. Diplomas Now has also been encouraging the schools in the network to participate in additional experimental and quasi-experimental studies to formally test ways of further strengthening the Diplomas Now model. For example, early reports from DN schools suggested that -- despite their other accomplishments -- these schools were not seeing game-changing improvements in overall school climate, school safety, or in student-student, teacher-student, and student-administrator relationships. In response, Diplomas Now sought and obtained funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and the PepsiCo Foundation to add the International Institute of Restorative Practices’ climate-, community-, and relationship-building program to 16 DN schools (all the DN schools from 11 of the randomization blocks in the larger i3 evaluation study). This “phase 2” work will allow exploratory analyses of combined impacts of Diplomas Now and Restorative Practices together on students’ EWI-related outcomes in this subset of DN schools and also permit comparative interrupted time series analyses of the value-added by Restorative Practices. Phase 2 measures, added to both the teacher and student surveys in all i3 study schools, will make it possible to explore the emergence of service contrasts related to restorative practices implementation.

System-level Continuous Improvement

Together fidelity of implementation and service contrast findings have aided the continuous improvement of the Diplomas Now model. Beginning with the development of a logic model and specified program components, Diplomas Now has been able to establish and share defined targets and expectations for schools. The value of these shared expectations cannot be understated when discussing system-level continuous improvement efforts. By articulating and defining model components and defining measureable targets, Diplomas Now was able to establish a systematic school-level annual data collection and analysis that allowed for comparison to program goals, comparison between different DN schools, and comparison between DN and non-DN schools’ activities.

Fidelity of implementation allowed for the comparison of how actual implementation activities matched the Diplomas Now model and varied across schools allowing the Diplomas Now national team to see where implementation supports were most needed. For instance, some inputs show more variation at different schools, potentially providing a resource to struggling schools through the identification of best practices at highly implementing schools. For example, the biggest differences between schools that implemented the most of the model overall and those that implemented the least could be seen in the inputs: Professional Development and Peer Coaching, Tiered

Intervention Model, and Strong Learning Environments. These were all areas that required changes in district or school policies and structures, suggesting that what separated higher- from lower-implementing schools were factors that needed more relationship building between Diplomas Now and the schools and districts they worked in and more programmatic flexibility to better utilize the systems already in place at the schools. Moreover, annual fidelity data and analysis has helped to inform and direct programmatic efforts, from directed focus towards specific inputs to the implementation of specific components of the model. For example, upon review of the first year of implementation findings, Diplomas Now made a concerted effort to ensure each school had the pertinent on-site support and that staff members were appropriately trained. Improved fidelity from Year 1 to Year 2 for the model inputs of Integrated On-Site Support and Program Staff Training and Development suggests an improvement in the appointment and training of Diplomas Now staff members in the second year. This shows how the Diplomas Now partners responded to problems from the first year that were clearly under their control and ensured that these components were better implemented in the second.

Through service contrast, Diplomas Now was better able to understand and provide context to the fidelity measures. Service contrast illuminates how Diplomas Now is changing school practices and structures, by documenting the extent to which Diplomas Now is creating differences between DN schools and non-DN schools. For example, although DN schools' overall average fidelity score did not change from Year 1 to Year 2, the service contrast between DN and non-DN schools widened in several areas: the frequency with which teachers collaborated in interdisciplinary teams, the professional development of teachers through peer coaching, and the use of data to identify struggling students. This growth in service contrast is at least partly attributable to a decline in the Diplomas Now-like services available at non-DN schools, which suggests that Diplomas Now brought more stability to the DN schools than they would have had otherwise.

Service contrast also helps to highlight areas for further inquiry and exploration by Diplomas Now. For example, there was little service contrast between DN and non-DN schools in their implementation of a college readiness curriculum, but the teacher survey responses indicate that district-wide efforts in these areas were under way in both DN and non-DN schools. Teachers at all schools reported that college readiness curricula and remediation courses for students struggling with math and English/language arts were in relatively wide use. Staff members at some DN schools were wary to change district-wide or existing curricula at their schools to the Diplomas Now curricula. This suggests an area where the Diplomas Now national team could realign their goals and efforts toward assessing the effectiveness of the school and district initiatives and supporting schools in strengthening the student supports already provided rather than offering alternative curricula.

Combined School- and System-level Continuous Improvement

Thus far, implementation of the model has been moderately successful and has resulted in DN schools becoming different from non-DN schools in their structure and organization, and in the practices employed by their staffs. Over two years, this contrast has increased despite stable implementation fidelity, suggesting Diplomas Now may have brought more stability to DN schools. The Diplomas Now continuous improvement effort is a set of interrelated data-driven activities at the school and system level, that together allow for a constantly improving model that comes from both bottom-up ingenuity and a supportive system-wide environment. Together school-level and system-level findings have aided the continuous improvement of the Diplomas Now model. EWI teams, collaborative leaderships teams, and national design and innovation challenges have allowed DN schools to focus on the needs and priorities within their school or district so that Diplomas Now works within their specific context. Additionally, the creation of a logic model and fidelity/service contrast measures have allowed Diplomas Now to focus on implementation across the network of schools so that the model can become stronger for general use and scale up. Moreover, the collaboration amongst Diplomas Now partner organizations and the evaluation team offers continuing opportunities for school- and system-level improvements. Moving forward, Diplomas Now continuous improvement efforts will continue to focus on ongoing school- and system-level aspects to inform programmatic decision making, while incorporating measures of early school and student outcomes. The inclusion of student outcome data will allow the evaluation team to test assumptions in the Diplomas Now model's theory of change (e.g., whether this effort helps students maintain better attendance, behave better in school, and improve their academic performance in core courses) which may lead to a better understanding of how and in what sequence an integrated reform model like Diplomas Now effects change in a school.

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Table 1
**Characteristics of Diplomas Now Study Schools, Other Schools in
Study Districts, and Average Schools in the United States (2010-2011)**

Characteristic	Study Schools	Other Schools in Study Districts ^a	Average U.S. Schools ^b
<u>Panel A: middle schools</u>			
Eligible for Title I (%)	100.0	92.9	72.3 **
Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (%)	83.4	79.1	50.2 **
Race/ethnicity of students (%)			
Black	62.4	46.1 *	16.4 **
Hispanic	31.3	39.6	19.1 **
Asian	2.0	3.9	3.9
White	3.6	9.2 *	56.7 **
Other	0.7	1.3	3.8 *
Gender of students (%)			
Male	52.1	50.9	51.2
Average number of students	588.6	419.1 *	518.6
Average number of students in grade 6 ^c	186.6	135.4	171.0
School setting ^d (%)			
City	87.9	88.6	24.7 **
Suburb	12.1	10.5	29.0 *
Town	0.0	0.1	14.8 *
Rural area	0.0	0.8	31.4 **
Average number of full-time teachers	42.5	38.0	38.4
Sample size	33	898	16,555

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Characteristic	Study Schools	Other Schools in Study Districts ^a	Average U.S. Schools ^b
Panel B: high schools			
Eligible for Title I (%)	100.0	93.1	54.1 **
Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (%)	73.2	72.0	41.0 **
Race/ethnicity of students (%)			
Black	58.1	38.3 **	16.3 **
Hispanic	32.7	46.5 *	16.2 **
Asian	4.7	4.7	4.2
White	4.0	8.9 *	60.3 **
Other	0.6	1.6	3.0 *
Gender of students (%)			
Male	52.3	49.6	50.9 *
Average number of students	1,438.8	1,291.3	1,204.5
Average number of students in grade 9	445.3	379.3	330.2 **
School setting ^d (%)			
City	82.8	85.4	22.3 **
Suburb	17.2	13.2	30.9
Town	0.0	0.0	17.4 *
Rural area	0.0	1.4	29.4 **
Average number of full-time teachers	78.9	68.8	70.7
Average promoting power ^e	56.0	65.8 *	80.9 **
Sample size	29	349	9,236

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Sciences, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data," 2010-2011 and 2007-2008.

NOTES: Four study schools, 22 schools in the "other schools in study districts" sample, and 2,798 schools in the "average U.S. schools" sample are missing data for "average number of students in grade 6" because they did not include sixth grades during the baseline year. Two middle schools and four high schools in the study schools sample are missing data on "average number of full-time teachers." One hundred and nineteen middle schools and 93 high schools are missing these data in the "other schools in study districts" sample, and 1,697 middle schools and 828 high schools are missing these data in the "average U.S. schools" sample. Nine middle schools and 13 high schools in the "other schools in study districts" sample are also missing data for "students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch," and 36 middle schools and 26 high schools in the "average U.S. schools" sample are missing data for this variable.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

^a"Other schools in study districts" include all other nonstudy schools in the same school districts as the Diplomas Now study schools that met the "average U.S. schools" criteria below.

^b"Average U.S. schools" include non-Diplomas Now study middle schools that during 2010-2011 had more than 25 total seventh-grade students and 25 eighth-grade students and non-Diplomas Now study high schools that had more than 100 total ninth-grade students, and during 2007-2008 had at least 100 students in the ninth grade. "Average U.S. schools" are also defined as "regular" schools by the Common Core of Data, and are located within the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

^cFour schools in the "study schools" sample did not have sixth grades during the 2010-2011 school year and are excluded from this analysis. Schools with fewer than 25 sixth-grade students were also excluded from the other two samples.

^dA "city" is defined as a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population greater than 100,000. A "suburb" is defined as a territory outside of a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of less than 250,000.

^e"Promoting power" is calculated as the ratio of twelfth-grade students in 2010-2011 to ninth-grade students in 2007-2008.

Table 2
Fidelity of Implementation Findings, Year 2,
All DN Schools, Schools in the Top Quartile, and Schools in the Bottom Quartile

Model Inputs	Average Fidelity Score			
	All DN Schools	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference
<u>Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities</u>	0.69	0.85	0.47	0.38 ***
Strong Learning Environments ^{a,b}	0.69	0.85	0.47	0.38 ***
<u>Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development</u>	0.37	0.67	0.15	0.52 ***
Professional Development and Peer Coaching ^{a,b}	0.42	0.84	0.05	0.79 ***
Curriculum for College Readiness ^b	0.31	0.50	0.25	0.25 **
<u>Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports</u>	0.69	0.76	0.56	0.21 ***
Tiered Intervention Model ^a	0.75	0.96	0.45	0.51 ***
Student Supports ^a	0.73	0.78	0.67	0.11 **
Student Case Management ^a	0.59	0.56	0.55	0.01
<u>Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate</u>	0.69	0.80	0.59	0.21 ***
Integrated On-Site Support ^a	0.87	0.90	0.82	0.07
Family and Community Involvement	0.51	0.70	0.35	0.35 ***
<u>Program Staff Training and Development</u>	0.71	0.80	0.59	0.20 ***
<u>Overall</u>	0.62	0.76	0.47	0.30 ***
Sample size	31	7	8	

SOURCE: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation program staff surveys, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

NOTES: Each of the nine inputs consists of a set of more specific components measured on a 0-1 scale. For each DN school, all of the component scores under an input are averaged to create the implementation score for that input. These scores are then averaged to create the pillar-level and overall implementation scores.

Using the overall implementation score for each school, the top quartile and bottom quartile of implementing schools were identified. The "top quartile" column is the average implementation scores of the seven schools that make up the top quartile and the "bottom quartile" column is the average implementation scores of the eight schools that make up the bottom quartile. The "difference" column is the difference between the average implementation scores for the top and bottom quartiles.

One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in this analysis.

A two tailed t-test was applied to differences. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

^aIndicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

^bStrong Learning Environments, Professional Development and Peer Coaching, and Curriculum for College Readiness include some components specific to either middle schools or high schools.

Table 3

**Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities,
Service Contrast, Teacher Responses, Year 2**

Survey Item	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Difference	Effect Size	P-Value
<u>Strong Learning Environments</u>					
Core teachers reported how many of their classes were 70 to 90 minutes. (0 = none, 5 = few, 10 = most)	6.4	5.2	1.2	0.24 ***	<0.001
Core teachers reported the frequency they collaborated with an interdisciplinary team of teachers who shared the same group of students. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	5.7	4.4	1.3	0.40 ***	<0.001
Core teachers reported hours spent each week collaborating with an interdisciplinary team and teaching coordinated content across disciplines. (0 = none, 5 = 1 to 2, 10 = 3 or more)	3.9	3.1	0.8	0.29 ***	<0.001
Math and English/language arts teachers reported participating in a professional learning community with teachers within the same subject area. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	5.4	5.1	0.4	0.13	0.285
Sample size	31	30			

SOURCE: Follow-up surveys of teachers administered during the school years of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Respondents included middle school teachers who taught sixth or seventh grade and high school teachers who taught ninth or tenth grade.

NOTES: "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies. Across 61 study schools, 1,269 core teachers participated in the follow-up survey, including 827 math and English/language arts teachers. One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in this analysis. For each of the above measures, data are missing for no more than 3.4 percent of the teachers. The difference in the percentage of missing data between DN and non-DN schools is no more than 1.2 percent for any of the above measures.

A two-tailed t-test was used for all statistical tests presented in this table. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Effect sizes were computed using the standard deviations of all non-DN school teachers for the respective measures.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

Table 4
**Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development,
 Service Contrast, Teacher Responses, Year 2**

Survey Item	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Difference	Effect Size	P-Value
<u>Professional Development and Peer Coaching</u>					
Average times per month math and English/language arts teachers reported working with an instructional coach. ^a	7.7	5.1	2.6	0.30 **	0.020
Average times per month math and English/language arts teachers reported receiving support from a school leader or a coach. ^a	13.6	9.6	4.0	0.28 **	0.024
<u>Curriculum for College Readiness</u>					
Math and English/language arts teachers reported implementing the same college preparation curriculum with all students in their classes. - <i>(high school only)</i> (%)	62.8	63.1	-0.3	-0.01	0.957
Math and English/language arts teachers reported struggling students in their courses received additional classes to catch up with their peers. (%)	68.7	70.7	-2.0	-0.05	0.665
Math and English/language arts teachers reported the average frequency they used a variety of student-centered teaching strategies. ^b (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	7.3	7.1	0.2	0.11	0.247
Math and English/language arts teachers reported the average frequency students applied classroom activities to real-life issues and used critical thinking and reasoning skills. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	7.1	7.1	0.0	0.00	0.974
Math and English/language arts teachers reported the average frequency academic courses included career applications and exploration. - <i>(high school only)</i> (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	4.9	4.8	0.1	0.04	0.795
Sample size	31	30			

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

SOURCE: Follow-up surveys of teachers administered during the school years of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Respondents included middle school teachers who taught sixth or seventh grade and high school teachers who taught ninth or tenth grade.

NOTES: Across 61 study schools, 827 math and English/language arts teachers participated in the follow-up survey. Across 29 study high schools, 465 high school math and English/language arts teachers participated in the follow-up survey. One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in this analysis. For each of the above measures, data are missing for no more than 6.2 percent of the teachers. The difference in the percentage of missing data between DN and non-DN schools is no more than 3.7 percent for any of the above measures.

A two-tailed t-test was used for all statistical tests presented in this table. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Effect sizes were computed using the standard deviations of all non-DN school teachers for the respective measures.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

^aSurvey items in this input have been calculated by weighting the frequency per month and then summing the weighted survey items in order to get a total times-per-month measure. For example, 0 = never, 1 = at least once a month, 2 = more than once a month but not weekly, 5 = once a week, 12 = more than once a week but not daily, and 20 = daily.

^bStudent-centered teaching strategies include demonstrations, modeling of strategies, and minilessons.

Table 5
Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports,
Service Contrast, Teacher Responses, Year 2

Survey Item	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Effect		P-Value
			Difference	Size	
<u>Tiered Intervention Model</u>					
Core teachers reported the average frequency they used attendance, behavior, and course performance data to target at-risk students. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	5.4	4.9	0.5	0.17 **	0.046
Core teachers reported hours spent each week reviewing student data with an interdisciplinary team of teachers to identify student needs. (0 = never, 5 = 1 to 2, 10 = 3 or more)	4.1	3.3	0.8	0.28 ***	0.003
Core teachers reported the average frequency they participated in meetings with administrators or counselors to identify at-risk students and plan interventions. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	4.9	3.3	1.6	0.57 ***	<0.001
Core teachers reported the average frequency they invited parents of at-risk students to participate in discussions about interventions to support their children. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	4.3	4.1	0.2	0.06	0.378
<u>Student Supports</u>					
Math and English/language arts teachers reported students who were often disruptive were offered behavior coaching. (0 = never, 5 = sometimes, 10 = always, as needed)	5.5	5.2	0.3	0.09	0.273
Math and English/language arts teachers reported the frequency students were provided additional support related to attendance. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	6.6	6.2	0.5	0.16	0.102
Math and English/language arts teachers reported the frequency students were offered individual or small-group tutoring during their classes. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	7.1	6.9	0.3	0.09	0.326

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Survey Item	DN Non-DN		Estimated Effect		P-Value
	Schools	Schools	Difference	Size	
Average times per month math and English/ language arts teachers reported students received whole-class behavioral support from volunteers. ^a	7.8	4.2	3.6	0.52 ***	<0.001
Average times per month math and English/ language arts teachers reported students received academic help in class from volunteers. ^a	43.8	21.2	22.7	0.73 ***	<0.001
<u>Student Case Management</u>					
Core teachers reported the frequency they arranged intensive support and interventions for students by making appropriate referrals. (0 = never, 5 = sometimes, 10 = always, as needed)	7.1	6.6	0.5	0.19 **	0.020
Core teachers reported the frequency needs assessments were conducted to quickly identify students' needs and address them effectively. (0 = never, 5 = sometimes, 10 = always, as needed)	6.0	5.6	0.5	0.16 **	0.033
Core teachers reported the frequency academic and nonacademic services were coordinated for students at risk of dropping out of school. (0 = never, 5 = sometimes, 10 = always, as needed)	6.3	5.3	1.0	0.34 ***	<0.001
Sample size	31	30			

SOURCE: Follow-up surveys of teachers administered during the school years of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Respondents included middle school teachers who taught sixth or seventh grade and high school teachers who taught ninth or tenth grade.

NOTES: "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies. Across 61 study schools, 1,269 core teachers participated in the follow-up survey, including 827 math and English/language arts teachers. One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in this analysis. For each of the above measures, data are missing for no more than 6.9 percent of the teachers. The difference in the percentage of missing data between DN and non-DN schools is no more than 5.3 percent for any of the above measures.

A two-tailed t-test is used for all statistical tests presented in this table. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Effect sizes were computed using the standard deviations of all non-DN school teachers for the respective measures.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

^aSurvey items in this input have been calculated by weighting the frequency per month and then summing the weighted survey items in order to get a total times-per-month measure. For example, 0 = never, 1 = at least once a month, 2 = more than once a month but not weekly, 5 = once a week, 12 = more than once a week but not daily, and 20 = daily.

Table 6
Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate,
Service Contrast, Teacher Responses, Year 2

Survey Item	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Difference	Effect Size	P-Value
<u>Integrated On-Site Support</u>					
Average times per month math and English/language arts teachers reported City Year AmeriCorps members worked with students. ^a	14.4	1.7	12.7	2.15 ***	<0.001
Average times per month math and English/language arts teachers reported City Year AmeriCorps members, college students, or volunteers from organized programs worked with students. ^a	18.2	3.4	14.8	1.70 ***	<0.001
Average times per month math and English/language arts teachers reported any volunteer worked with students. ^{a,b}	23.7	6.9	16.8	1.03 ***	<0.001
<u>Family and Community Involvement</u>					
Teachers reported the frequency parents and community members were offered opportunities to participate in school initiatives. (0 = never, 5 = less than weekly, 10 = daily)	4.3	4.3	0.1	0.03	0.708
Teachers reported the school had a plan for parent and community engagement linked to specific goals for improving student learning and healthy development. (%)	54.2	53.3	0.9	0.02	0.769
Teachers reported the school helped all parents understand what they could do at home to support a student's success in school. (0 = strongly disagree, 10 = strongly agree)	6.3	6.2	0.1	0.04	0.561
Sample size	31	30			

(continued)

Table 6 (continued)

SOURCE: Follow-up surveys of teachers administered during the school years of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Respondents included middle school teachers who taught sixth or seventh grade and high school teachers who taught ninth or tenth grade.

NOTES: Across 61 study schools, 1,818 teachers participated in the follow-up survey, including 827 math and English/language arts teachers. One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in this analysis. For each of the above measures, data are missing for no more than 7.8 percent of the teachers. The difference in the percentage of missing data between DN and non-DN schools is no more than 3 percent for any of the above measures.

A two-tailed t-test was used for all statistical tests presented in this table. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Effect sizes were computed using the standard deviations of all non-DN school teachers for the respective measures.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

^aSurvey items in this input have been calculated by weighting the frequency per month and then summing the weighted survey items in order to get a total times-per-month measure. For example, 0 = never, 1 = at least once a month, 2 = more than once a month but not weekly, 5 = once a week, 12 = more than once a week but not daily, and 20 = daily.

^bVolunteers include: City Year AmeriCorps members, students from local college or teacher-preparation programs, members of organized volunteer groups, peer tutors, and community members.

Table 7
Fidelity of Implementation Findings, All DN Schools, Comparison of Year 1 and Year 2

Model Inputs	Average Fidelity Score		
	Year 1	Year 2	Difference
<u>Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities</u>	0.67	0.69	0.02
Strong Learning Environments ^{a,b}	0.67	0.69	0.02
<u>Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development</u>	0.37	0.36	-0.01
Professional Development and Peer Coaching ^{a,b}	0.44	0.42	-0.02
Curriculum for College Readiness ^b	0.30	0.31	0.01
<u>Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports</u>	0.72	0.69	-0.03
Tiered Intervention Model ^a	0.76	0.75	0.00
Student Supports ^a	0.72	0.73	0.00
Student Case Management ^a	0.69	0.59	-0.10 ***
<u>Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate</u>	0.65	0.69	0.04
Integrated On-Site Support ^a	0.82	0.87	0.05 **
Family and Community Involvement	0.48	0.51	0.03
<u>Program Staff Training and Development</u>	0.61	0.71	0.10 ***
<u>Overall</u>	0.61	0.62	0.01
Sample size	32	31	

SOURCE: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation program staff surveys, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

NOTES: Each of the nine inputs consists of a set of more specific components measured on a 0-1 scale. For each DN school, all of the component scores under an input are averaged to create the implementation score for that input. These scores are then averaged to create the pillar-level and overall implementation scores.

One DN school closed prior to the second year of implementation and is not included in the Year 2 analysis.

A two tailed t-test was applied to differences. Statistical significance levels are indicted as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aIndicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

^bStrong Learning Environments, Professional Development and Peer Coaching, and Curriculum for College Readiness include some components specific to either middle schools or high schools.

Figure 1
Diplomas Now Logic Model

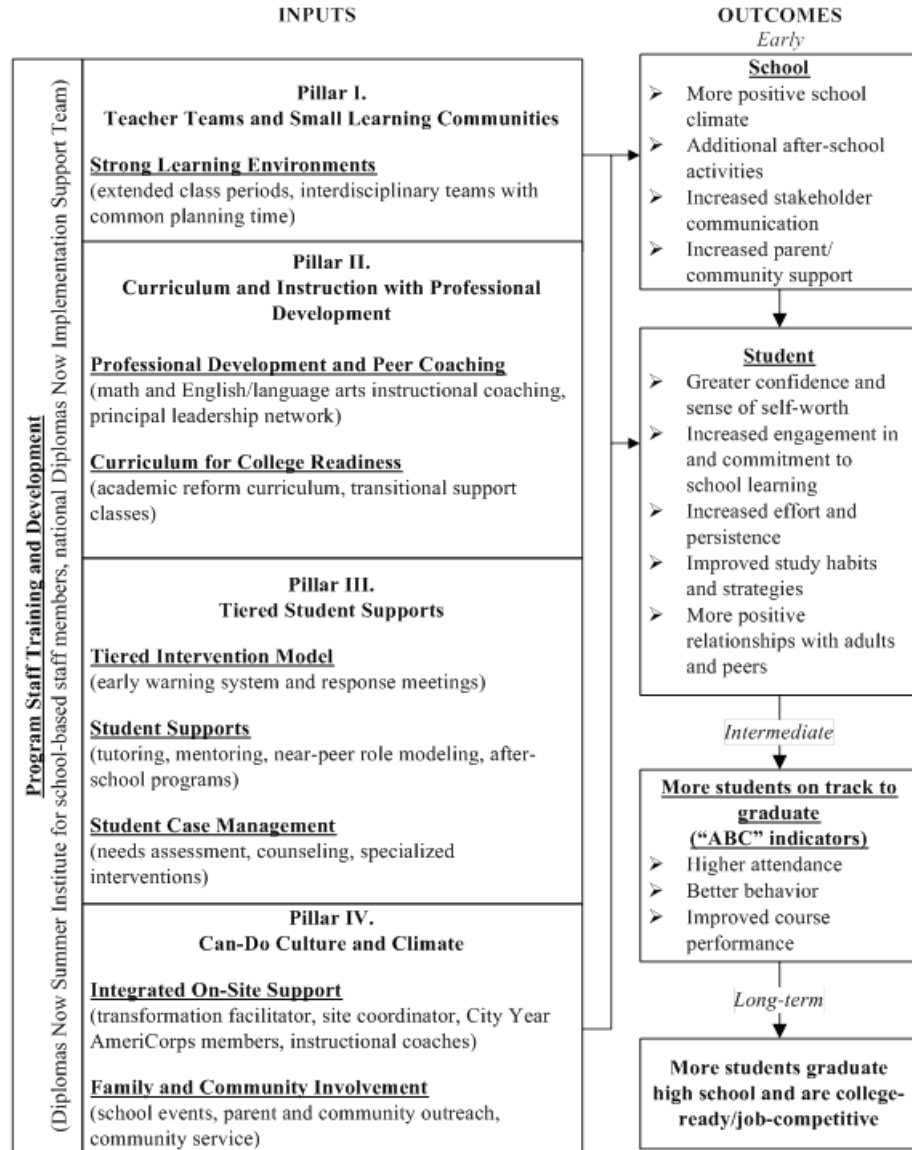
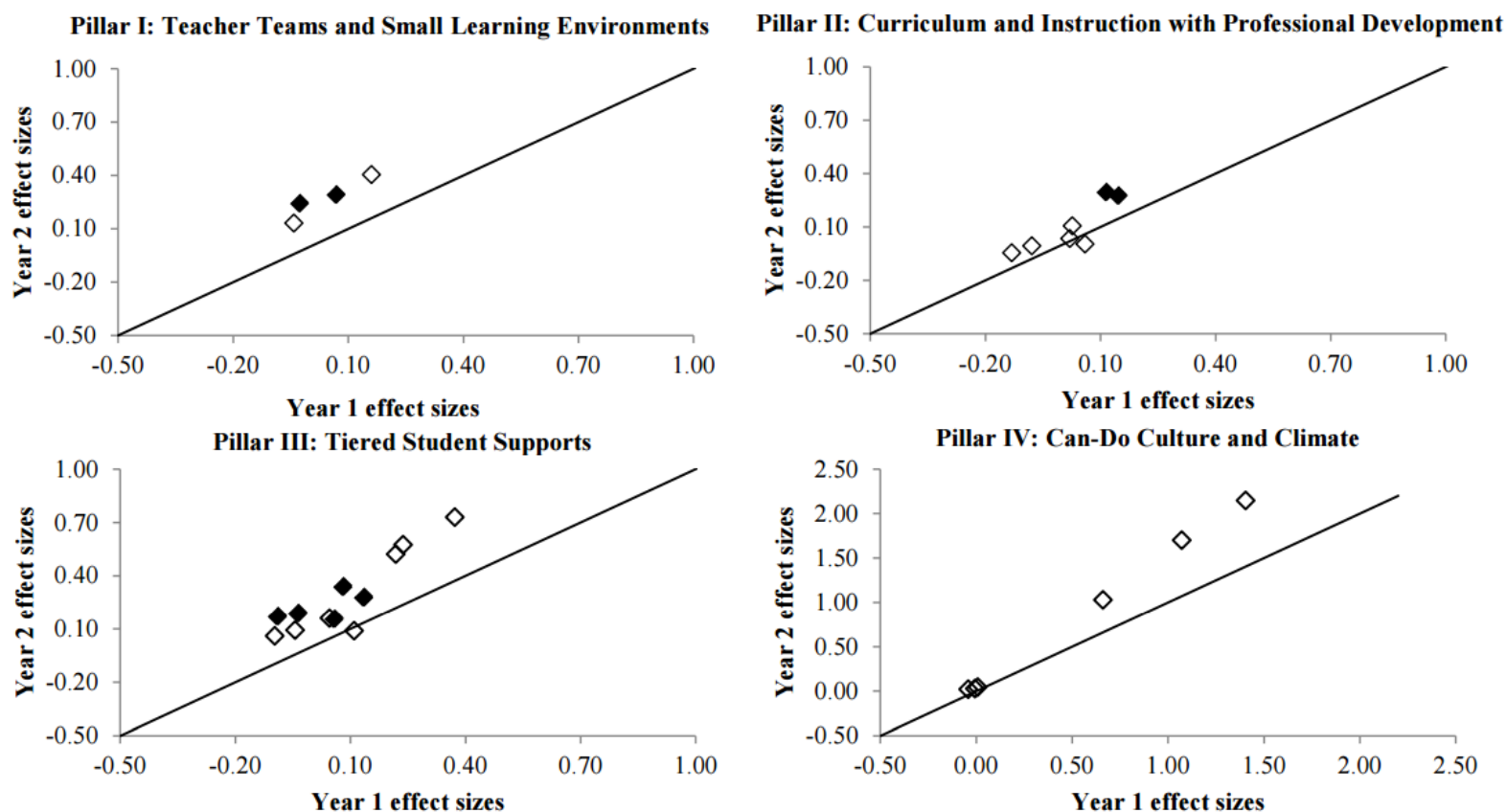


Figure 2

Comparison of Year 1 and Year 2 Service Contrast Teacher Measures, by Pillar



SOURCE: Follow-up surveys of teachers administered during the school years of 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014.

NOTES: Each data point represents the difference (in effect size) between DN and non-DN teachers' responses to each survey item for Year 1 and Year 2. Data points that are shaded represent survey items that were not statistically significant at the 10 percent level in Year 1 but became statistically significant in Year 2. Unshaded data points represent survey items that were either statistically significant in both years or not statistically significant in either year. A two-tailed t-test was used for all statistical tests.

Effect sizes were computed using the standard deviations of all non-DN school teachers for the respective measures.

Box 1. The Diplomas Now Partners and Their Roles

Talent Development Secondary

Talent Development Secondary, based at Johns Hopkins University, provides organizational, instructional, curricular, and data support to schools intended to help all students achieve at high levels and prevent them from falling off track. This school-wide effort includes reorganizing students and teachers into small learning communities, providing professional development and coaching to strengthen teacher pedagogy, and supplying college and career preparatory course content. Talent Development Secondary employs a school transformation facilitator who works with school leaders to develop a systematic school transformation plan, creates and manages an Early Warning Indicator data tool, organizes frequent multidisciplinary teacher-team data-response meetings that use the tool to guide a multi-tiered student support process, and works closely with local or regional instructional facilitators to oversee instructional and curricular reforms. School-based instructional coaches in English/language arts and math support teachers' delivery of course content. For many students, whole-school organizational and instructional reforms, referred to as Tier I interventions, are enough to keep them on track. However, for some students, the Early Warning Indicator data indicate that additional and more intensive services are necessary. City Year and Communities In Schools play leading roles in providing these additional services.

City Year

City Year is an AmeriCorps program through which young adults ages 18 to 24 participate in a year of national service. A team of 10 or more City Year AmeriCorps members is assigned to a school, increasing the number of adults in a building paying attention to students and working with them both in- and outside of classrooms. The team is led by a City Year program manager and team leaders (typically second-year AmeriCorps members), and its members are trained to provide a variety of academic and behavioral interventions — referred to as Tier II support — intended to help students stay on track to graduate. These “near peers” (given their proximity in age to the students) serve as tutors, mentors, and role models, personalizing the school experience of the students. In addition, the AmeriCorps members provide after-school programs and help teachers by working with students during class time.

Communities In Schools

Through a school-based site coordinator, Communities In Schools, a national dropout-prevention organization, draws on school and community resources to organize services — referred to as Tier III support — intended to move the students at the highest risk of dropping out back on track to graduation. The site coordinator assesses the needs of a student, develops an individual case plan to address those needs, and connects the student to services aligned with the case plan. Examples include professional counseling on anger management for a student with behavioral issues or long-term tutoring with a subject-area expert for a student far behind in class. A site coordinator will also provide direct services — for example, leading student discussion groups on topics like conflict resolution or the transition to adulthood.

Box 2. Transforming Rival Student Gang Members – Who were Off-Track Due to Fighting -- Into “Leaders of Positive Change”

At a DN high school in the Southeast, several teachers who were on the same EWI team independently e-mailed their school transformation facilitator (STF) the names of 3 students who were exhibiting dangerous and disruptive behavior problems, including fighting. Resulting suspensions were leading them to miss school and putting them seriously behind in their coursework. The STF put these 3 students on the agenda for that week’s meeting of the EWI team. As the team members – the students’ teachers, the STF, the City Year Corps members assigned to that EWI team’s homeroom sections, and the administrator assigned to the team – talked about the students and shared information, it became known that all 3 students were gang members (2 from an African-American gang and 1 from a rival Haitian gang). To quote the STF: “They were always in fights with each other. And even when they were off school grounds, they were always fighting.”

Instead of creating an intervention for just these 3 students who happened to be served by the same teacher team, the EWI team realized that the conflict among these 3 gang members was just a microcosm of a larger “gang war” involving as many as twenty Haitians and African-Americans from different grade levels across school. That larger conflict had turned the school into a war zone. So the EWI team referred the problem to the school’s collaborative leadership team.

The collaborative leadership team, the principal, assistant principals, Talent Development Secondary’s STF, City Year’s program manager, and Communities in Schools’ Site Coordinator, polled other EWI teams to identify additional students who were involved. Then, the leadership team began developing a *Leaders of Positive Change* initiative for these students and their families to help the members of the rival gangs to “come together” both literally and figuratively and engage in joint positive work that might calm the conflict and replace the harm the conflict was causing in the community and in the schools with restorative good works and cross-group friendships.

The leadership team got all the gang members from both rival gangs, put them in the auditorium and talked about their harmful behavior in the school and made it clear that such behavior would not be tolerated. The students and their parents were told that, instead of fighting, the students were going to be going together—on the same bus!-- into the community to work together in unity to do good. These outings included such activities as going to the public library to read to young kids, going to a nursing home to help out with the elderly residents, and buying Christmas gifts for kids battling cancer and delivering them in person at the local hospital. At the beginning, the students and the carefully-selected chaperones were justifiably nervous during these “field trips.” An early trip, to read to some fifth graders at an elementary school, went relatively smoothly until the bus returned to the high school. Then, the (not-yet) “leaders in positive change” got off the bus and began fighting. But, with time and continued interventions -- talking and planning with both gangs together in the auditorium, constant supervision, having frequent contact and communication with parents – the students began talking with each other, joking with each other, and realizing: “Man, you know what? These guys aren’t bad.” The Leaders in Positive Change initiative recently completed its’ second year of operation and the school’s suspension numbers have clearly gone down because of it.

Box 3. Helping Seniors who have Failed to Clear the “Algebra Test” Hurdle Standing Between Them and Graduation

At a DN high school in a big-city district in the southeastern United States, one of the responsibilities that the principal has given Talent Development Secondary’s STF is to monitor the graduation requirements not yet met by the school’s seniors. Each year, with the assistance of the “data maven” from the district’s regional office, the STF creates a spreadsheet that (1) shows the status of each senior on the various graduation requirements and (2) flags, in red, any requirements that have not yet been met.

Then, the STF works with the collaborative leadership team, counselors, and the schools’ college advisor to marshal additional supports and interventions for students at risk of not graduating on time or of failing to connect with college, university, or other appropriate post-secondary education options. One major subgroup requiring attention each year are seniors who have not yet passed the statewide Algebra I End-of-Course assessment, even after several attempts and after additional instruction from 10th grade on. Fortunately, there is an alternative test that students can take and pass to meet this graduation requirement and also serves as a placement exam to get into the state’s community college system, so if the students pass it, they don’t have to take remedial classes in college to start off their college career.

The STF sorts and filters the spreadsheet to compile the list of seniors still needing to meet the Algebra I End-of-Course Math requirement and forwards this list to the school’s principal, test coordinator, college advisor, and counselors. These students then take the alternative test once a month and receive targeted after-school tutoring twice a week from an adjunct math professor from the community college system to buttress students’ conceptual understanding, skills, and strategies until they have cleared this graduation hurdle. The principal provides a bus to take the participating seniors home after each tutoring session ends so that they don’t have to stress about missing their regular bus ride. This intervention has helped many students to jump their last hurdle to on-time graduation.

Box 4. Opening Strong 2016 Memo: The importance of an early focus on attendance

Welcome back! We hope that everyone is having a great opening to the school year and wanted to send out a note to the field highlighting some of our data around attendance from last school year and the importance of focusing on helping students start the school year off right with regards to their attendance.

As you know, September is national Attendance Awareness Month. For the past several years, Diplomas Now has worked closely with our school partners to focus on attendance during the first 20-30 days of school. Data from the 2014-2015 school year highlights the critical impact that opening attendance has on Diplomas Now students:

- Students who were off track in attendance during the 1st quarter were almost **three times as likely to end the year with an EWI** compared to students who had on track attendance rates during the first quarter (76% of students with off track attendance during Q1 ended the year off track compared to only 28% of students who had on track attendance during Q1).
- **Attendance issues in September and October are not driven by enrollment issues.** 84% of the students who had off track attendance in Q1 continued to be enrolled at school at some other point in the school year, and 66% were enrolled at their schools the entire year.
- **30% of students who ended the year with an off track indicator were only off track in attendance.** This means solely attendance is keeping almost 1 out of every 3 DN students from being successful. Helping these students get their attendance on track would increase our overall on track rate nationally from 65% to 75%, a substantial increase on this important metric for our work.

We have compiled all of the resources that DN and TDS have pulled together since the launch of the I3 study in 2011 in one Dropbox that can be found at this link—[\[link address removed\]](#).

These resources include the attendance analysis/audit supports, lesson plans that teach the importance of attendance as part of orientation, and ideas around interventions focused on specific reasons for missing school. Please review these resources with your Diplomas Now team.

Due to the importance of attendance on student and school success, we are asking each school to take the following steps over the next month:

- Clearly outline how you are addressing attendance awareness, tracking, intervention, and celebration in the Opening Strong Plan/School Transformation Plan.
- Put systems in place that ensure **every student who misses 3 days of school in the first month** has an “attendance conference” with an adult when they arrive back at school (the questions used for the attendance analysis can be a helpful guide for attendance conferences).

(continued)

Box 4 (continued).

We are also strongly encouraging each school to take the following additional steps over the next month:

- Conduct an attendance analysis to gain a better understanding of why students are missing school
- Find opportunities to explicitly teach students about what 90% attendance looks like (missing no more than 2 days of school a month), the connection between attendance and getting your diploma, and how to engage in planning to avoid common pitfalls for missing school. We have written outlines for mini-lessons (no more than 15 minutes) around each of these objectives, and encourage all teams to use them, particularly with new 6th and 9th graders.

In order to celebrate and reward all of the great work being done around attendance, we will be hosting our Fall Attendance competition again this year. Prizes will be awarded for:

- Highest overall attendance on-track rates (MS and HS)—monthly awards for September, October, and November and a special first quarter award
- Biggest improvement in attendance on-track rates from SY14-15 to SY15-16 —monthly awards for September, October, and November and a special first quarter award
- Special awards for all schools in the 90/90 club (90% of students with 90% attendance or better each month) for each month and at the end of the first quarter
- Special awards for all schools in the “Leaps and Bounds Club” that achieve double digit improvements in their attendance rates each month and at the end of first quarter

We will also be hosting several virtual discussions and chat sessions for schools that are focusing on attendance issues as part of their Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles this year. We are really looking forward to learning from one another around how to get every to student to school regularly!

Your DN Ops Team will be in touch soon to ensure that you and your school have the support you need to improve individual student and overall school attendance. If you have any questions regarding DN’s support for attendance initiatives this year, please don’t hesitate to contact Kathy Nelson at [\[email address removed\]](#).

Box 5. Developing (Effective but Feasible) Personalized Supports

The seedbed of Tier I initiatives and Tier 2 interventions, EWI meetings also provide teachers and other support providers who know the same students an opportunity to develop a personalized support plan for a hard-to-reach student who is not yet responding to these initiatives and interventions. Two examples of personalized supports developed at DN Schools in 2014-2015:

Helping a Troubled Video Game Fanatic to “Buy-In” to Better Behavior. An EWI team was discussing, in turn, each student flagged by the EWS for off-track behavior. When the discussion reached a student with an individualized education plan (IEP) for an emotional-behavioral disability who was never well-behaved in class, some members on the team simply said “he’s ESE (in Exceptional Student Education) and super, super hyper” and suggesting moving on to the next student on the list. But, others countered, “Look, we understand he’s ESE, but we can’t just throw our arms in the air and do nothing. He’s always getting out of his seat, always giving his teachers a hard time, always a clown and never easy to handle. There must be something we can do to connect with him and make things better.” Then, one of the City Year Corps members said, “You know what? This kid really loves video games. He’s a video game fanatic.” This news got the team thinking of a possible win-win approach that might give the student a reason to work on his disruptive behavior, while simultaneously giving him a reason to look forward to school. The school had already established positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) program in which students were able to earn points redeemable for items of interest (such as “school-spirit” wristbands, t-shirts, or caps) or special perks. One perk that might appeal to this student, who had never earned such points, was the school’s PBIS Game Room with a flat screen TV, a video gaming system, and popular video games like Madden Football and NBA Live. The game room (adjacent to the cafeteria) was open during each lunch hour but the admission cost was only payable in PBIS points. The EWI team commissioned the STF to meet with the student and say, “Look, if you get your act together and behave appropriately, you can play video games after you eat your lunch. Admission to the game room only costs xx points.” His teachers were all on board, and initially gave him points for small personal victories of improved behavior (e.g., “You got to class on time and you are sitting down: points!”) and then upped their requirements over time. His behavior improved dramatically and his conduct grades went from Fs to Cs and Bs. At a subsequent EWI meeting devoted to reviewing results of interventions, the teachers were glowing about the improvement of this student.

Engaging a Goth. A ninth-grade student flagged for abysmal attendance and D’s in English was discussed by her EWI team. Teachers reported that the student was deeply engaged in the Goth-Rock subculture – always wearing black clothes, black makeup & eyeliner, and a nose ring—and *disengaged* from the school. When nudged to do her work, she would say, “I don’t have to do this work, my mom’s doing the paperwork to transfer me from this dump to a charter with an awesome art program.” Thus, the EWI team decided to ask their own art teacher, who was also a part-time curator at a local museum, to mentor the student. The intervention began with the STF meeting one-on-one with the student to point out that “if you don’t have good grades and good attendance, no charter is going to admit you.” Then, the STF took her to the art teacher and the art teacher talked to her, saying, “Bring in your work. I’ll critique it. I’ll be honest with you. I’ll help you improve. If your work is good enough, I’ll display it in the museum. But you need to do well in school; that way you can get into a college with a strong art program.” Her attendance, grades, and behavior dramatically improved and her artwork (now on display in the museum) went from good to great.